

THE NEW PROTESTANT DEBATE

OVER SEX

Protestant theologians have recently been involved in serious and frequently heated discussions about the kind of guidance the Church should be giving young men and women on questions of sexual conduct. Redbook presents here two divergent views on the subject. Harvey Cox, teacher of theology and culture at Andover Newton Theological School, wrote his article for "Christianity and Crisis." The article that follows it, by Robert E. Fitch, dean and professor of Christian ethics at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, appeared originally in "The Christian Century."

BY HARVEY COX

When John U. Munro, dean of Harvard College, warned his students last fall that their sexual conduct in dormitory rooms was "getting closer and closer to outright scandal," other university officials added the somewhat less than surprising comment that traditional religious teaching seemed to offer students little guidance in sexual behavior. The Harvard furor came on the heels of a recommendation by British Quakers that traditional Christian sexual ethics be totally overhauled, sanctioning sexual relationships before and outside of marriage under proper conditions. Meanwhile, back at the Key Club, *Playboy* editor Hugh Hefner's wearisome attack on the religious repression of sex has reached its 16th turgid installment.

In short, the whole vexing question of the Christian estimate of sexuality seems to have crept out from under the rug where it had been so carefully swept.

In view of the immensity of this erotic Augean stable, the best one more article can hope to do is to ventilate one small corner. I propose therefore to limit my discussion to a single issue: the traditional ideal of premarital chastity.

I choose this not because of any belief that this is really the key issue. It does seem clear, however, that

for many young adults today "to bed or not to bed" seems to be the Big Question, and I believe the reasons they press it so vigorously merit exploration. Three aspects of the problem require particular attention: (1) why the yes or no of premarital chastity is more critical for young adults today than in the past; (2) why the answers we usually give to this question are either not heard or provide little guidance; and (3) what, if anything, we should be saying about the matter.

The question of premarital chastity is not the only one in which the yawning disparity between what we say and what we do in America is being questioned and examined. Negroes are calling on us to do what we say about equality and justice. Young adults are challenging us to say what we really do in the area of sex. In both areas the contradictions have about reached their limit.

Let us reject at the outset any Kinseyan inference that what is being done should determine what ought to be done. But let us candidly admit that our culture has undergone drastic changes. Though our Puritan style of life has vanished almost completely, the Puritan sexual ethic remains, at least on paper. We have exchanged ankle-length dresses for bikinis. We hold blanket parties instead of apple bobbings. But the people caught up in these epochal changes are still taught, albeit with winks and evasions, the selfsame code of total premarital abstinence that was instilled into Priscilla Alden.

We have thus fashioned for unmarried young adults a particularly unfortunate combination of emotional environments. They are constantly bombarded—through clothing styles, entertainment, advertising and courtship mores—with perhaps the most skillfully contrived array of erotic stimulants ever amassed. Their sexual fears and fantasies are studied by motivational researchers and then ruth-

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—ROBERT E. FITCH

lessly exploited by mass-media hucksters. Elizabeth Taylor's bosom decorates billboards, and throaty songstresses hum their hoarse invitations from transistors.

Yet we pass on to our youth, unaltered, a set of behavioral taboos that in a sex-saturated society seem diabolically created to produce a high level of duplicity and desperation.

Why have we deliberately constructed such a bizarre disbalance in our moral and psychological milieu? Obviously because we want to have our cake and eat it too. We want to gorge ourselves at the table of an affluent society whose continued prosperity, we are told, necessitates a constantly expanding market. And sex sells anything. At the same time we want to cherish our national memories of Pilgrims and piety, including the sexual code of Massachusetts Bay. The inherent contradiction comes home to roost in the already tormented psyche of the unmarried young adult.

In a sexually exploitative society, youth picks up the tab for our hypocrisy. Exposed to all the stimulants that married people are, young people are forbidden the socially acceptable form of fulfillment. The refusal is expressed both in the laws of the realm and in the official taboos of the culture. Enforcement, however, is sporadic, and because the signals are so confused and contradictory, adolescents suspect that it is all one vast dissimulation.

No wonder the "beatnik," who rejects both the signals of the mass media and the sexual mores, becomes the secret hero of many young adults.

To make matters just a bit more trying, we have thoughtfully provided Jane and Joe with more privacy and permissiveness in dating than ever before. This extends far beyond Harvard dormitory rooms. I wonder if Henry Ford ever realized that his invention would be viewed by many not primarily as a means of transportation but as the urban society's substitute for Keats's "elfin grot."

Remember also that dating (and with it various types of petting) now reaches back to the sixth grade. Youngsters are thus exposed for a longer period and much more intensely to the sexual exploration which is the American courtship pattern. The only advice they get is "don't go too far," and it is usually the girl who is expected to draw the line.

By the time a girl who begins petting at 13 has reached marriageable age, she has drawn an awful lot of lines. If she is especially impressed with her religious duty to avoid coital intercourse before marriage, she will probably have mastered by the age of 21 all the stratagems for achieving a kind of sexual climax while simultaneously preventing herself and her partner from crossing the sacrosanct line.

What this border-skirting approach does to inhibit her chances for a successful adjustment in marriage is a question now engaging the attention of psychologists and marriage counselors. One psychologist who specializes in sexual behavior remarked recently that if Americans had consciously set out to think up a system that would produce maximal marital and premarital strife for both sexes, we could scarcely have invented a more sexually sabotaging set of dating procedures than we have today. This may be an overstatement, but I suspect the inherent hypocrisy of the cultural taboo and the patterns of behavior it engenders must have considerable negative influence on marriage.

Add to this the fact that penicillin and oral contraceptives will soon remove the last built-in deterrents to premarital intercourse, and the reason for the recent rumblings of discontent with traditional standards becomes clearer. Not that the young adults themselves are guiltless. They share the blame for perpetuating the same values. But they also consider themselves to be the victims of a kind of cultural charade. They are shown one thing, told another, and they never know when society will wink and when it will whip (Continued on page 104)

distractedly through her hair and went to the door.

"May I come in?" he asked.

She stood aside, noticing a tiny spot on his chin where he had cut himself and feeling the familiar rush of tenderness toward him.

"I thought I'd stop by and see if you were in a better mood by now," he said easily.

She blinked at him, unable to find anything to say in the wave of frustration that washed over her. The bickering, the cold arguments, the increasingly temporizing reconciliations—could he dismiss all this as a mood?

"No," she said, "I'm not."

He ignored her answer. "Got a cup of coffee?"

"No. I'll fix you one."

"Never mind," he said. "I'll get myself a drink. How about you?"

She shook her head.

She heard him open the refrigerator, remove one of the stubborn ice trays and slam the door. She sat down and picked up a magazine from the coffee table and began thumbing through it. I can't do this, she thought wildly; I can't sit here and look at him and yearn for him and tell him it's over. She felt helpless, trapped by her need of him.

He sat down in the chair opposite her, swishing the drink around in the glass. "Why don't we talk this over?"

They had been through this before too—the long, emotional scene, Paul recounting her faults coldly and factually; Jenna first angry, then placating, as his anger mounted to meet hers. And in the end her asking forgiveness, his generous insistence that part of the blame was his.

"Talk what over?" she asked, lighting a cigarette and willing the trembling of her hand to stop.

He looked at her patiently, as one might look at a small child. "Why you're angry with me," he said.

"But I'm not," she said quickly.

He took a long drink from the glass and then began searching his pockets for a cigarette. "Is it because I didn't call yesterday?" he persisted.

She opened her mouth to answer but he rushed on.

"You were upset over something when I left Friday."

Yes, she had been angry.

"But that isn't really when it started, is it, Jen?" he interrupted her thoughts. "Something's been wrong for a long time, hasn't it?"

She sat quietly for a moment. I can't do this any more, she thought again—from anger to elation and back again, constantly, every day, one or the other. "Yes, Paul." The sound of her voice surprised her. "It just isn't working out. For either of us."

He drained the glass in a quick gulp. "You really mean it, don't you?"

"Yes." Still she could not look at him. I do mean it, she cried to herself. I can't bear being torn up like this all the time.

"Then I'll be going." He stood up, picked up his coat, then hesitated, one hand on the doorknob.

"Is there someone else, Jen?"

She rose quickly and walked toward him. "No, there's no one, Paul." She

stopped and looked down at her slippers, avoiding his eyes. "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too, Jen." An odd note in his voice brought her gaze up to his. He had never been more handsome. A slight smile gave him a forlorn, appealing look. "I really am."

They stood looking at each other, each reluctant to move; then finally he took one step toward her. "One last kiss," he murmured.

With a swift, sure instinct she understood. Despite all their other troubles, she had never failed to respond to his kisses, to the warmth of his embrace. She felt surrender in her bones; she could picture herself at a moment in the future clinging to him, denying that she had ever been willing to let him go. She let her face be lifted to his. It's another way of putting the whole thing on an emotional level, she thought—the counterpart of the scenes they had been through. Her eyes opened wide in amazement at the thought.

His lips were a shock when they touched hers. They were cool—where was the warmth that had always been there? Was it possible that it had come from her, not him? Where was the tenderness? This was not the moving, passionate Paul she had known. This was a stranger whose kiss was as impersonal as a soft breeze; it was nothing more than a brief sigh for all the things that might have been but that now would never be.

Had he really changed so much in these few months? Or had she? Had

she fitted him to her own pattern of need, ignoring those parts that *didn't* fit? Had she not rejected the real Paul, content only with the idealized version of her own construction? She had not loved Paul at all; she had been in love with her own image of love. To let go of him was to abandon a childish world for the real one.

She took a step backward, feeling a wild surging inside her. Tears and laughter mingled in her throat. She reached out and patted his arm gently. "I'm sorry, Paul," she repeated.

He took one last look at her, then turned and went out the door.

She closed it behind him, then clasped her hands together and walked slowly to the window. Poor Paul, she thought—poor, dear Paul. The tears rolled almost gaily down her cheeks for a moment. She sniffed a little, smiling, and wiped away the tears.

She opened the window and leaned out, looking at the park. The snow was almost completely gone now, melted during the afternoon, leaving behind only an occasional sliver of white. In the late-day light there was the faintest shimmer of green around the trees.

They're getting ready to bud, Jenna thought happily. Why, it's almost spring and I hadn't even noticed.

She recalled his question: Is there someone else? No, she thought now. But there will be sometime. And I will not be in love with love; I will be in love with him.

THE END

Advertisement



DO FACE CREAMS REALLY WORK?

by Helen F. Porter

A good part of my time as a beauty consultant has been spent studying all kinds of face creams. I've found, as I'm sure many of you have, that while most creams did some good, none really satisfied me.

But recently I've been using a face cream that I think is just what women have been hoping for. It's light and greaseless, and its skin-softening emollient formula includes *polyunsaturates*. Now, I'm sure you're all aware that as we get older our skin tends to become drier, while its supply of moisture-retaining natural oils—skin-softening polyunsaturates and emollients—slowly drains away. For example, there is a particularly noticeable loss of polyunsaturates (before the age of

25, the skin's natural supply of polyunsaturates is 50% greater than after age 40).

The beauty of this cream I've been so pleased with, is that it helps compensate for the reduction of natural skin oils by putting a supply of oils and emollients, including polyunsaturates, right on your skin. Yet, this cream smooths into your skin almost instantly, and never leaves a greasy film on your face... or your pillow case.

The name of this cream, which is made here at Prince Matchabelli, is Polyderm Compensating Cream. I'm sure that once you start using it regularly, you'll find, as I did, that Polyderm moisturizes your skin—gives you a softer, smoother, younger looking complexion.

I use Polyderm *every* night before bed, starting at the base of my throat, and massaging my skin for a minute—gently upward and outward, right up to the roots of my hair. And every morning, Polyderm goes on first, before I make up.

If you'd like to see whether you like the feel of Polyderm Compensating Cream on your skin, and whether you like what its emollient polyunsaturate formula does for *your* complexion, I've arranged to have a trial-size made available. For a full week's supply, just send 25¢. your name and address to me, Helen F. Porter, at Prince Matchabelli, Box 272, Mount Vernon, N.Y. Polyderm is available at leading drug and department stores for \$2 to \$7.50, plus tax.

Protestant Debate Over Sex

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them. Their suspicion that they are the fall guys in a giant collusion is expressed in their growing demand that we come clean on this matter.

Now we can turn to the question of why, amidst this schizophrenic carnival of prurience and prudery, the Christian Gospel seems to offer so little positive guidance. I believe the answer to this question is that most young adults do not perceive Christian sexual ethics as "evangelical"—that is, good news. They are not hearing the Gospel as good news and therefore they are not hearing the Gospel at all, but something else.

This may in part be their own fault. We all have ways to avoid hearing what we do not want to hear. But much of the blame lies with those of us who bear the responsibility of seeing to it that the real Gospel, and not some distortion of it, is preached.

The German theologian Friedrich Gogarten states that the two most serious dangers from which the Gospel must be protected are (a) its being dissolved into a myth and (b) its being hardened into a religion of Law. In either case it ceases to be the Gospel. When we examine what has happened to the Gospel as it touches the area of sex, it is evident that both these distortions have set in.

The Gospel comes to the sexual puzzle of most young adults not as a liberating "yes," not as God's Good News freeing them for personhood and community. It comes rather as a remnant of cultural Christendom and an assortment of confused conventions. To be heard once again as the Gospel, it must be de-mythologized and de-legalized.

Let us turn first to the task of de-mythologizing it from odd bits of sexual folklore with which it has been confused. I shall refer to only two of the many mythical motifs that obfuscate the Gospel in its bearing on sexual conduct. First the ideal of romantic love, which has been traced to paganism and which is almost always fused with any young American's ideas about sex. Second, the Western obsession with coital intercourse as normative sexuality and hence as that which defines the content of "chastity" and "virginity."

The ideal of romantic love is the most obvious mythical excrescence. It leads often to the belief, especially among girls, that certain forms of intimacy become progressively less objectionable the more you "love" the boy. The snares in this curious amalgam of Our Gal Sunday and St. Teresa are manifold. Among adolescents of all ages "love" has come to mean nothing more than a vague emotional glow. It's "that ol' black magic," "those icy fingers up and down my spine."

The belief that "love" is the only honest basis for sex forces countless maidens into anguished efforts to justify their sexual inconstancy by falling in and out of love with a passing parade of partners. Naturally, opportunities for self-deception are almost endless, and the outcome is often an acid cynicism about the possibility of ever really loving anyone.

Since girls feel they must be swept into sexual experience by something "bigger than both of us," they often fail to take the precautions against pregnancy they might otherwise take. Somehow it doesn't seem romantic to go out with a boy having prepared in advance to be swept off one's feet. Consequently many instances of intercourse are not "planned," but occur more or less spontaneously at the end of an evening of progressively heavier necking. Unwanted pregnancies, abortions, shattered family relations and forfeited careers are the inevitable result.

One solution is to admonish everybody to avoid any physical contact that could spiral toward intercourse. But how sane or compassionate is this advice in a society where various types of petting are the only socially approved way of handling tensions exacerbated by a sexually saturated culture?

Another antidote is simply to de-romanticize sex. This would mean urging young people who are going to have intercourse anyway (and who, under layers of unsuccessful self-deception, know they will) to accept the full responsibility for their behavior and to take the necessary steps to avoid pregnancy.

Such a solution, although more realistic, has almost as little chance of acceptance as the first. It would necessitate dispelling the illusions of romantic love and suggesting that young people ponder soberly in the light of day what they are really doing. But it would also require our society to face up to the cant and flim-flam of its sexual folkways, and this no one really wants to do. So the black magic, petting and pregnancies will probably continue.

A more stubborn and deceptive segment of folklore that has been equated with the doctrine of premarital chastity is one that is rarely discussed openly: the curious presumption that a person who has not experienced coital intercourse remains a virgin—no matter what else he or she has done. This popular piece of legerdemain explains in part the discovery by Kinsey that although the incidence of premarital intercourse among women has merely mounted steadily, premarital petting of all varieties has skyrocketed.

Kinsey's finding could be substantiated by the most casual observer of the American college scene. The number of students who do not pet at all is virtually negligible. An increasing number regularly carry their necking to the point of heavy sex play, assuring themselves that this is an acceptable practice, since they have "never gone all the way." Their "premarital chastity" is intact.

Or is it? Only, I submit, by the most technical definition of what it means to preserve virginity. True, some writers actually advocate petting as the "safest" way for unmarried people to achieve satisfaction. However distasteful this idea

may seem to some, it is extremely important to realize that the Church's traditional teaching actually functions in such a fashion as to give considerable support to this view.

The ideal of premarital chastity is generally understood to mean that although necking is somewhat questionable, the fragile gem of virginity remains intact so long as coitus is avoided. This myth has helped to open the floodgate to a tidal wave of noncoital promiscuity.

Here the de-mythologizing process might be helped if we note St. Paul's insistence (in I Corinthians 6:15-16) that liaisons intended to be highly casual, for example with prostitutes, nevertheless involve us in a relationship that is inevitably much deeper than we bargained for. We "become one flesh."

St. Paul saw the striking fact that as human beings we both have and are bodies. He saw that sex is not simply a physiological but a "bodily" (somatic) activity. It involves us at the deepest levels of our personal identity.

St. Paul knew that no sexual relationship could be kept merely physical without ceasing to be really sexual in the fully human sense of the word. This is why the "playmate-of-the-month" domestication of sex as a purely recreational pursuit just doesn't work. Paul really appreciated sex more than *Playboy* magazine does. He expected more from it. Sex is certainly fun, but to make it simply fun is to eviscerate and enfeeble it. And then it eventually ceases even to be fun.

When it is de-mythologized, the evangelical sexual ethic turns out to be an invitation to life together in a community of personal selves. The Gospel frees us from the need to cling to romantic self-deception and the righteousness by which we clothe our promiscuity in the costume of technical virginity. By delivering us from mythology into history, Jesus Christ allows us to see that the marvelous skein of privileges and responsibilities in which we find ourselves as human beings is something for which we are responsible. But how do we exercise this responsibility?

At this point the going becomes more difficult. Any effort to arrest the degeneration of the Gospel into some form of Law will be viewed in some quarters as "antinomianism," the belief that the precepts of the Law are not binding for Christians. A Gospel ethic, however, demands more maturity and more discipline than a Law ethic. Evangelical ethics are by nature riskier. This risk must be run, since the New Testament insists unequivocally that it is the Gospel and not the Law that saves. How, then, can we begin to "de-legalize" the Gospel when sexual behavior is the question at issue?

The Gospel is addressed to persons; the Law sees acts. One weakness of the traditional ethical formulation on premarital chastity is its sweeping inclusiveness and total lack of discrimination. Reduced to a precept, the ideal of premarital chastity permits no distinction between intercourse by engaged couples, for example, and the chilling exploitation of high-school girls at fraternity parties. Both are transgressions of the Law, and there is no middle ground between virginity and non-virginity.

Consequently there emerges alongside the technical virgin her shadowy counterpart, the technically fallen woman, the girl who because she once consented to intercourse now feels she is permanently pastured among the goats. She has crossed the sexual Styx, and there is no way back. Because she can no longer present herself to her husband in purity on the wedding night anyway, why shouldn't anything go?

Her self-condemnation arises in part because she has not heard the good news. She has perceived the traditional teaching as a law. Law without Gospel is arbitrary and abstract. It cannot discriminate among cases. And it has nothing helpful to say to the transgressor. Consequently, for the increasing proportion of young people who have already had sexual intercourse, the rule of premarital chastity is simply irrelevant. And since for many it appears to be the only record the Church ever plays on this subject, they conclude the Church has nothing to say to them.

But preaching the Gospel also entails preaching the Law, i.e., exposing the false absolutes from which one is liberated. Negatively this means making clear the distorted images of sex from which the Gospel delivers us. Positively it entails protecting sex as a fully human activity against all the principalities and powers that seek to dehumanize it. In our day these include the forces, both within and without, that pervert sex into a merchandising technique, a means of self-aggrandizement, a weapon for rebelling against parents, a recreational pursuit, a way to gain entrance into the right clique or—let the reader beware—a devotional act with some sort of religious significance.

To be freed from the "bondage of the Law" means to be freed from these dehumanizing powers. It also means to be freed from those diabolical pressures toward subcultural conformity that push so many adolescents into whatever is "in" at the moment. Sexual freedom in Christ, in one concrete case, means that a harried coed can say no to a cloying Romeo without feeling she is being hopelessly square.

Evangelical ethics cease to be Law and once again become Gospel when the Word liberates people from cultural conventions and social pressures, when persons discover their sexuality as a delightful gift of God that links them in freedom and concern to their fellows. But how do we make this Gospel heard by young adults in today's sexually rapacious society?

Before answering this question we must admit that we have created a set of cultural conditions in which sexual responsibility is made exceedingly difficult. In our American Xanadu, exhortations to individual continence are almost as useless as urging businessmen to eschew the profit motive.

It is strange how even people who see most clearly that crime, illegitimacy, narcotics addiction and poverty are largely structural problems still interpret the increase in premarital sexual experience as a breakdown in personal morals.

But the jig is nearly up. Our feverish effort to paper over a society propelled by drives for sex and status with a set of Victorian courtship mores is breaking

down badly. We must direct our fire more toward the cynical misutilization of sex by the public-relations culture than toward the hapless individual offender.

This may involve some searching questions about limiting the deliberate use of sexual stimulation in selling or, even more radically, about the merit of an economic system that seems to require a constant perversion of sexuality in order to survive. Commercial exploitation of sex drives—not the call girls—is our most serious form of prostitution today.

When we do turn from the society to the individual, especially to the unmarried young adult, we must avoid giving a simple yes or no answer to the question of premarital chastity. Of course, this will sound like evasion, but any simple answer panders to the cheap attempt to oversimplify the issue, to reduce all the intricacies of premarital sexuality to one decision. And churchmen, by allowing the Gospel to deteriorate into folklore and fiat, have contributed to this fatal oversimplification.

I do not believe that an evangelical ethic of premarital sex can be chopped down to a flat answer to this freighted question without impoverishing and distorting it. Instead of registering an an-

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swer, the Gospel poses a question of its own (as Jesus himself frequently did with such questions). It asks how I can best nourish the maturity of those with whom I share the torments and transports of human existence.

To refuse to deliver a prepared answer whenever the question of premarital intercourse pops up will have a healthy influence on the continuing conversation that is Christian ethics. It moves the axis of the discussion away from the arid stereotypes by which we oversimplify intricate human issues. It gets us off dead-end arguments about virginity and chastity, and forces us to think about fidelity to persons. It exposes the promiscuity of sexual pharisees and the subtle exploitation that poisons even the most immaculate Platonic relationships.

By definition "premarital" refers to people who plan to marry someone someday. Premarital sexual conduct should therefore serve to strengthen the chances of sexual success and fidelity in marriage. And we must face the real question of

whether avoidance of intercourse beforehand is always the best preparation.

This question includes consideration of the appropriate degree of sexual intimacy during increasingly extended engagement periods. The reason it cannot be answered once and for all is that circumstances vary from couple to couple. Guidance must be given with specific persons rather than with general conventions in view.

Admittedly this approach requires more resourcefulness and imagination than relying on universally applicable axioms. Principles are useful, perhaps indispensable, in ethical thinking, but all too often "sticking to principles" can become just another way to avoid seeing persons. It can signify a relapse from Gospel into Law.

Perhaps one day we in America will put away childish things. Perhaps one day we will outgrow our ridiculous obsession with sex, of which our fixation on chastity and virginity is just the other side of the coin. Until that time, however, we should rejoice that in Jesus Christ we are freed from myth and from Law. We are placed in a community of selves, free to the extent that we live for each other, free to develop whatever styles of life will contribute to the maturation of persons in a society where persons are often overlooked as we scamper to pursue profits and piety all at once.

by Robert E. Fitch

Some of the more backward countries in the world are suffering from a population explosion. One of the more advanced countries in the world, the United States, is suffering from a sexpllosion—sexploitation being the most popular form of conspicuous consumption in the affluent society.

The sexpllosion has two obvious features. One might be labeled simply as sex on the loose. It is characterized by the discarding of many historic moral restraints, great indulgence in premarital sexual intercourse, earlier marriages, more unwanted babies. Among emancipated spirits this complex of activities is generally referred to as the "new freedom."

The other feature of the sexpllosion has to do with the official upholders of morality, who stand about either wringing their hands in mild dismay or rubbing their hands in modest satisfaction, and who proclaim sagely that traditional standards for sexual conduct have disintegrated.

What is new about all this? Certainly there is nothing new about the first feature. The revolt against moral restraints over sex is as old as the problem of the first Israelite families that settled in Canaan and had to guard their offspring against the enticements of the fertility cults, as old as the breakdown of Roman sexual morality coincident with the decline and fall of the Roman empire, as old as the flamboyant dispersion of all sexual restraints in the England of the Restoration that succeeded the rule of Cromwell and the Puritans. To talk of newness here is to talk nonsense.

The only thing new about the situation is the attitude of futility among those who should be the guardians of morality. And—let's face it—this attitude is at its worst in the ranks of liberal Protestants. Indeed, the situation is almost enough to make one want to turn Catholic or Jew, or

to espouse some kind of religion that still has a residual belief in an objective moral law.

A good example of the ethical relativism of the devout—an example that blends quaintness, naïveté and unconscious caricature—is to be found in a report issued recently by 11 English Quakers (an unofficial report, however, and not to be fastened on the entire Quaker community). In reading the group's report, titled "Towards a Quaker View of Sex," I could not help thinking that these worthy Friends are about as reliable in regard to sex as some of their brethren have been in regard to Russia. This is to say that though their approach to sex, like their brethren's to Russia, is charitable and full of the best intentions, they fail altogether to realize that they are dealing with a tremendous natural vitality that could overwhelm them completely should they be too trifling and sentimental in their apprehension of it. I, too, in my regard for sex, feel charitable and full of good intentions. But I think I have also learned to respect its power. And there are times when this spirited creature requires not just to be cajoled with a lump of sugar but to be bound with bit and bridle.

If we are to get down to fundamentals, however, we shall have to begin by realizing that for some decades now we have been the victims of the grossest kind of deception. Part of this deception is a fraud perpetrated from without by alleged authorities on sex. Part of it is the folly whereby we have deliberately deceived ourselves with certain rationalist illusions.

The Big Fraud resides simply in the fact that those who have pretended to be authorities on the matter have been individuals whose personal acquaintance with sex has been slight, nonexistent or perverse, but rarely robust and normal. From authorities of this sort we generally get one of two emphases.

One emphasis says that Sex Is Everything. In this tradition belong Schopenhauer, Freud, George Bernard Shaw, Havelock Ellis and Walt Whitman. Schopenhauer clearly hated sex. Shaw, like Schopenhauer, linked sex with the life force, but by deliberate contract abstained from it in his own marriage. Freud was quite decorous in his own conduct and had a mild sexual drive that terminated early in life. Havelock Ellis, with all his sex mysticism, was sexually impotent for the better part of his career. And Walt Whitman, who touted sex so brazenly in verse, almost certainly never knew a woman in the flesh.

The other emphasis says that Sex Is Nothing. This is simply a latter-day development of the previous emphasis—a swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the other. As a consequence of this outlook we get all sorts of delightful, care-free literature in which heroes go skipping and heroines go scampering from one couch to another in a sort of "musical beds" melee; it is always a big joke to discover who is going to end up where, but it really makes no difference—because, as we have learned from *Irma la Douce* and other productions of its kind, harlotry is really just good, clean fun.

One of the rationalist illusions with which we deceive ourselves says that the

Mature Adult can handle his sex. Today a principal claimant to being a Mature Adult is the college undergraduate who insists on the right to entertain members of the opposite sex privately in his dormitory quarters. If the facilities are such that the student has a sitting room apart from the bedroom, that is one thing. But if, as in most cases, the student's room is obviously first of all a bedroom, with no furniture conducive to comfortable sitting and talking, that is something else. In any case I wish someone would tell me: When a healthy young man entertains a healthy young woman privately in a bedroom, what, under the circumstances, really is mature, adult behavior?

One mark of a mature person is that he knows the limits of his capacity for self-control. There are certain situations that he simply will not let himself get into because he knows that he cannot control them. Indeed, is it not peculiarly the mark of the immature adolescent to insist on liberty unlimited and to believe that he can take good care of himself always and everywhere?

Another of the current rationalist illusions says that Science provides for everything. Scientific knowledge, it is confidently claimed, can be a substitute for moral disciplines. If there is any outrageous discrepancy in the instruction of today's youth in matters of sex, it lies here.

No previous generation of young people has had such an enormous and detailed amount of information made available to it concerning the scientific facts. And probably none has been left so ignorant of and so undisciplined in the ethical essentials. This situation in the personal sphere is no less scandalous than would be, in the public sphere, our releasing atomic energy entirely into the hands of technicians and forgetting about moral and political controls.

Another part of the faith in the omniscience of Science is the belief that development of contraceptive devices has abolished the need for moral controls. So we proceed to speak glibly about planned parenthood. Yet any marriage counselor knows that many married couples don't have babies when they want them and do have babies when they don't want them. If married folk fail in this sort of planning and control, how can persons involved in an extramarital relationship do any better? In fact, they don't. Babies are spilling out all over the place. It is yet to be demonstrated that there is any mechanical or chemical device that can effectively contain human passion and caprice.

When we turn away from the frauds and the illusions to the realities of the present scene, one fact stands out: Young people today are losing control of their lives. They are having babies when they don't want them. They are getting married before they really want to. They are taking jobs before they are adequately prepared for them. And this is the "new freedom"! But freedom is precisely what is being lost. There is pathos in the life of anyone who has cheated himself of the freedom really to choose to get married, to choose to have a baby, to choose to take a job.

If there is anything really new in the situation of the young people themselves, it lies in the attitude of the young women. Just after World War I, when the sexual explosion began, one could encounter any number of young women who boasted of their emancipation and insisted on sexual equality with men. Today, however, the voices of the young women are curiously silent—perhaps because after some years of playing at freedom and equality they realize they are still trapped with the fact that in the end it is the girl who is always left holding the baby.

Meanwhile those adults who ought to be providing some sort of guidance are lost in an orgy of open-mindedness. One distinguished Biblical theologian of sex, after overcoming the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans, succumbs to Freud, Fromm and Kinsey as he exclaims: "The clock cannot be turned back. The young cannot be kept down on the farm after they've seen Paree. The only direction open now is forward."

If we ask what direction is "forward" in regard to the problem of premarital sexual relations, we are fobbed off with a lot of fine talk about "responsible liberty," "walking in the Spirit" and "doing all things to the glory of God." Surely this is the first time that what Aldous Huxley once called "an unpremeditated tumble in the hay" has been suggested as perhaps attributable to the agency of the Holy Ghost. This sort of talk is the last gasp of a permissive Pelagian pedagogy.

If nothing but nonsense can be found in such quarters, I am persuaded that much common sense is still to be found among the young people whose lives lie at the center of the confusion. Indeed, it is amazing how well they do when they get not bad advice but simply none at all. Already many of them are skeptical of the Big Fraud and of the Rationalist Illusions. If they have broken loose in some ways, there are other ways in which they begin to approach sanity. They have an increasing contempt for promiscuity either before or after marriage, and less and less confidence in divorce as a device for solving marital difficulties.

With the growth of realism in members of the younger generation, perhaps even their teachers will begin to rediscover that many of the so-called "traditional controls" are deeply rooted in the common sense of the race. In the outcome there should be at least three ingredients: (1) a newly achieved frankness about sex and love, not merely grounded in science but also shored up by great traditions of value in literature, religion and ethics; (2) an unequivocal affirmation that sex belongs to the "whole man," that it cannot be separated—without incurring natural penalties—from love, honor, duty, loyalty, sacrifice, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health"; (3) a fresh understanding of the fact that sex, far from being merely personal, is irretrievably social in its significance—and that its relationships to family and to children, to community and to country and to the several arts and sciences of man are a part of the privileges and responsibilities into which we enter when we share in it.

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